

# EVIDENCE ACT LEARNING AGENDA FOCUS AREA – GRANT COMMITMENTS MET

## ISSUE SUMMARY

Under the “Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018” (Evidence Act), Congress directed all federal agencies to build and use evidence to improve policy, program, operational, budget, and management decision-making. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) leads this effort on behalf of the Federal Agencies. EPA’s Vision for the Evidence Act is that every program engages in evaluative thinking about the strategies they are using to reach program goals and has a plan to determine if the strategies they are using are having the expected outcomes/impacts. One of EPA’s Priority Areas under the Evidence Act, as determined by the EPA Administrator, is Grant Commitments.

Every year, EPA awards over \$4 billion in grants and other assistance agreements. Through these grants, EPA helps to protect human health and the environment through the work of small non-profits, academic institutions, states, tribes, and local communities. Ninety-six percent of these grants are awarded to state, local, and tribal governments to implement environmental programs.

While EPA’s grant policies require each award be tied to the Agency’s Strategic Plan and that the environmental results associated with grant actions be clearly established, the management and tracking of the individual awards is dispersed amongst approximately 1,400 staff throughout headquarters and EPA’s 10 Regional offices. The agency’s lack of a comprehensive system for tracking grant-related activities leads to an inability to proficiently evaluate environmental outcomes on a national scale.

## BACKGROUND

For the Grant Commitment Priority Area, per the Evidence Act and OMB direction, EPA developed an Interim Learning Agenda. Work under the Interim Agenda is a first step towards better understanding current grant reporting and tracking processes across the agency’s 105 current grant programs. This baseline will help EPA develop a sustainable and consistent process for tracking the environmental outputs and outcomes resulting from EPA’s grant funding. Over the last two years, the Office of the Administrator has engaged program offices to better understand the agency’s grants management processes, including reporting mechanisms and frequency. The agency found that due to variability in programmatic goals and metrics, the management of EPA’s grants and cooperative agreements is highly variable. While some regions and programs employ a coordinated process to negotiate and track grant commitments, others rely on Project Officers to negotiate and track grant activities. In addition, the agency’s centralized grants management system is unable to expand to collect and track grantee progress on discrete commitments. EPA’s work under this priority area will further agency efforts to effectively report on the outcomes of taxpayer dollars expenditures and to make informed resource decisions.

## MOVING FORWARD

- Develop, pilot and refine survey instrument and questions (Oct-Dec 2020)
- Collect data from all NPMs/Regions (Jan-Mar 2021)
- Compile/analyze results (Apr-Jul 2021)
- Data summary report of current baseline (Jul-Sep 2021)

LEAD OFFICE/REGION: OCIR/R9

OTHER KEY OFFICES/REGIONS: OCFO, OMS